

<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

---

## Traces of Bahramubin in Greek, Armenian, Arabic and Persian historiographical sources

Maristo, Joonas

2016

---

Maristo, J. 2016, 'Traces of Bahramubin in Greek, Armenian, Arabic and Persian historiographical sources', *Studia Orientalia Electronica*, vol. 4, pp. 13-23. <  
<https://journal.fi/store/article/view/52829> >

---

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/333280>

---

cc\_by  
publishedVersion

---

*Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.*

*This is an electronic reprint of the original article.*

*This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.*

*Please cite the original version.*

## **TRACES OF BAHRĀM ČŪBĪN IN GREEK, ARMENIAN, ARABIC, AND PERSIAN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES**

**Joonas Maristo**

*University of Helsinki*

In this article I examine four historiographical sources originally written in Greek, Armenian, Arabic, and Persian regarding Bahrām Čübīn. Given that the sources represent four distinct historiographical traditions, they will shed light on the traditions' respective styles, tendencies, and religious and historical affiliations.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Persian general Bahrām Čübīn is a fascinating figure in historiographical accounts, because he is dealt with in many different ways depending on the political, religious, and historical affiliations of the writers and the sources they use. Comparing different accounts of his character and actions gives us a cross-section of the styles and influences on historical writing in the writers' particular times, contexts, and languages.

To get a basic understanding of stories related to Bahrām Čübīn, we can summarize the essential historical pieces of information known to us. The larger historical context in the end of the sixth century within the Sasanian Empire comprises continuous conflicts and political rivalries with the Byzantine Empire. In spite of the “treaty of fifty years”, signed in 562 between the two Empires (Shahbazi 1989), war broke out 572 (Greatrex & Lieu 2002: 149) in Armenia and fighting continued in the Transcaucasia and Mesopotamia (Greatrex & Lieu 2002: 153, 160). Even with continuous diplomatic efforts and negotiations, the animosities did not come to a halt until 591, after which the years of peace continued until 602. In addition to the fighting with the Roman Empire, the Persians had to cope with the attacks of the Hephtalites starting in 558 (Shahbazi 1989).

Bahrām Čübīn's birth date is unknown, but his short reign occurred between 589 and 591, when the whole Sasanian Empire was under political convulsions. In his early career he served as an army general in Hormizd IV's (reign 570–590 CE) army. He was known to be a charismatic and victorious general who won many battles against the Hephtalites and Byzantines and had a distinguished position in the Sasanian army. According to Simocatta (*History*: 101), Bahrām commanded a cavalry force that captured Dārā in 572 (Shahbazi 1989). For reasons that appear to be mainly unknown and are sometimes contradictory in different historiographical accounts, he started a mutiny in autumn 589, while Hormizd IV was still in power (Simocatta, *History*: 239). We know that Bahrām was

in power for a short time from the 6th of February in 590 until his death in late summer 591 (Simocatta, *History*: 239).<sup>1</sup> This occurred after Hormizd IV was toppled, which led the Empire into a state of chaos. Rather than Bahrām Čübīn, Hormizd IV's son, Khosrow II, should have succeeded his father in power. This did happen later, but only after Bahrām had been defeated and killed. After Bahrām's defeat, Khosrow II reigned until 628.<sup>2</sup>

One can divide Bahrām's life into three phases: early army career in Hormizd IV's army, rebellion against Hormizd IV, and usurpation of royal power.<sup>3</sup> In this article, we will confine our discussion to the following three themes: reasons for the rebellion, the legitimacy of power, and religious themes relating to Bahrām Čübīn and his life.<sup>4</sup>

To start, we should examine and analyze the earliest surviving historical accounts and how Bahrām Čübīn is portrayed in them. These sources are Sebeos and Simocatta.<sup>5</sup> I will then contrast these two accounts with al-Ṭabarī's and Bal'amī's texts.<sup>6</sup> All four can be seen as representatives of their own distinct historiographical traditions, although al-Ṭabarī and Bal'amī have a special connection with each other as Bal'amī is a "translation" of al-Ṭabarī.

## SEBEOS ON BAHRĀM ČÜBĪN

Sebeos wrote his history in the mid-seventh century at the end of the first phase of the Islamic conquests, approximately sixty to seventy years after Bahrām's death.<sup>7</sup> Sebeos's history is written in Armenian. His perspective is Persian rather than Byzantine; he presents Armenia as a component of the Persia-centered world (Howard-Johnston 2000: xi; 2006). Nevertheless, regarding religion, his standpoint was Christian. It is crucial to understand that Armenian historiographical writing is saturated by a Christian world-view, looking upon anything outside of Christianity as pagan. This tendency is especially emphasized in attitudes towards Persians, former rulers of Armenia who exercised a strong cultural influence up until the fourth and fifth century CE. (Darayee 2010: xviii; Howard-Johnston 2000: xiii–xiv)

Sebeos's history includes about ten pages of accounts of Bahrām Čübīn and related events (Sebeos, *The Armenian History*: 14–23). The information is divided in two chapters, and it covers, chronologically, the events from the early victories of Bahrām Čübīn until his usurpation and death.

Sebeos's account of Bahrām is concise but detailed. He begins by listing some of Bahrām's achievements as Hormizd IV's general. He then describes how Bahrām fought a victorious battle against the king of the Turks and killed him. After this, Bahrām sent one portion of the booty and a letter to the Persian king, Hormizd IV. The rest of the booty he handed out to his

1 According to Shahbazi (1989: 514–522), Bahrām proclaimed himself the king of kings in Ctesiphon in summer 590.

2 Christensen (1907) also gives us an important source on Bahrām Čübīn by trying to reassemble the lost *Bahrām Čübīn nāma* by extant sources.

3 For more information, see Shahbazi 1989.

4 Religious aspects of Bahrām's life seem to have very little, if any, significance in Persian and Arabic sources. I will comment on them anyway because Pourshariati (2008: 398–404) puts such weight on naming Bahrām Čübīn "Mihrānīd Bahrām-i Čübīn" and attributing the reasons for the rebellion to Mithraic worldview and antagonism between the Sasanians' state religion and Parthian Mithra worship.

5 Sebeos, *The Armenian History*: 14–23; Simocatta, *History of Theophylact Simocatta*: 80–85, 100–153.

6 al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa al-muluk*; Bal'amī, *Tārīkh-nāme-ye Ṭabarī*.

7 The last events he relates are defeats of the Muslim conquerors in 654 and 655 in Cappadocia, Media, Iberia, and the Caucasus, see Howard-Johnston 2000: xxix.

men according to each one's merit. Hormizd IV was left with mixed feelings: he was happy for the victory but at the same time furious that Bahrām had not sent more of the booty. Therefore, instead of expressing his gratitude, Hormizd IV sent Bahrām a letter blaming him in very angry terms. He also sent a company of auxiliaries towards Bahrām's troops in order to demand the missing booty. The king's servants were killed by Bahrām, in an obvious sign of revolt. Bahrām's men pledged allegiance to Bahrām which created an important detachment and counterweight to Hormizd's remaining troops. (Sebeos, *The Armenian History*: 15–16)

Therefore, in Sebeos's account it was Hormizd IV's short temper that initiated the hostile exchange of words rather than wicked nature or insidious intent on the part of Bahrām Čübīn. In other accounts, Čübīn's evil character is given a more important role.

Stylistically, Sebeos uses several rhetorical devices; among them is the inclusion of speeches and letters. However, the distinction between mere literary invention and authentic official information is not clear cut, especially when it comes to letters, since we know that Sebeos had access to the Armenian Catholicosate's official documents (Howard-Johnston 2000: liv). Sebeos includes two letters from Bahrām to Mushel Mamikonean, Armenian sparapet and general. According to Howard-Johnston, in their form and rendering there is very little to make one suspect that Sebeos might have invented them or amended them in order to serve his own agenda. Sasanian Empire had fully functioning bureaucratic apparatus and it is no surprise that official notices and communiqués reached Armenia and were preserved in an archive where Sebeos had access to them. And also, given the circumstances and Bahrām's difficult position in facing the troops of Khosrow II, his letters to Mushel make sense. (Howard-Johnston 2000: lxxv)

In the letters, Bahrām endeavors to form an alliance with Mushel, attempting to persuade him by promising considerable territorial concessions. For example, he would give the whole of Armenia to Mushel. It is also revealing that Bahrām calls the house of Sasan a "universal scourge" (Sebeos, *The Armenian History*: 20). Mushel did not answer the first letter, so Bahrām had to compose another one. This second was in a more aggressive vein. Finally, Mushel replied and included ideas regarding the legitimacy of Bahrām's power:

Kingship is from God, and he gave it to whom he wished. But you must be sorry for your own self, and not for us. I know you for a braggart. You do not have confidence in God, but in valour and the strength of elephants. But I tell you that, if God wills, tomorrow the combat of valiant men will envelop you, and they will burst upon you and the multitude of your elephants like the most violent clouds of heaven [...] For if God wills, a fierce tempest will blow away your power like dust, and the royal treasure will return to the palace. (Sebeos, *The Armenian History*: 22)

This passage is noteworthy in that it gives no justification whatsoever to Bahrām's kingship. Elsewhere in the text, Sebeos does not make mitigating comments. In fact, this is the only clear commentary on dynastic legitimacy. Sebeos clearly condemns Bahrām's attempts to gain power. In this regard, it is important to remember that in Sebeos's account, this antagonistic attitude was not reserved exclusively for Bahrām. For instance, Sebeos (Howard-Johnston 2000: xi) depicts Khosrow II as "destructive and ruinous Khosrov, cursed by god". His overall attitude towards Persians is negative.

It is also significant that Bahrām is called 'servant of Mithra'.<sup>8</sup> Sebeos is the only source that explicitly associates Mithra worshipping with Bahrām Čübīn. In fact, Bahrām is introduced

---

<sup>8</sup> In the translation there are two appellations associated with Mithra: Vahram Merhewandak and rebel *mihrats*'i. See Sebeos, *The Armenian History*: 15, 20.

with this name, which suggests that there was a palpable link between Bahrām and Mithra worshipping and that the tradition had preserved this idea vividly in people's minds.

It may also be that Sebeos simply wanted to associate Bahrām, a pagan from his Christian point of view, with a Persian god, or in any case, with a non-Christian god, in order to underline the contrast of their different religious stand points. This, we cannot know. What we do know is that Sebeos's motive in general was pro-Christian, as we have stated earlier, and that his attitude towards Persians was distrustful, not to say hostile.

On a second occasion, a description of Bahrām Čübīn appears in the form of "the rebel *mihrats'ī*". This passage connects the rebellion and Mithraic features, but we cannot conclude that the very reason for rebellion was the Mithraic belief. It could also be the case that other reasons, unknown to us, initiated the rebellion, and its author just happened to be a Mithra worshipper.

Mihr as a god's name also appears in Bahrām's first letter to Mushel Mamikonean, when he swears by the "great god Aramazd, by the lord Sun and the Moon, by fire and water, by Mihr and all gods" that the kingdom of Armenia will be given to Mushel if he is willing to give him military help (Sebeos, *The Armenian History*: 21). This passage is interesting since, at the same time, it both strengthens the affiliation between Bahrām and Mithra and removes the exclusiveness of Bahrām Čübīn's Mithraic beliefs, since it seems to set other objects of worship on an equal footing with Mihr. It attributes no superiority to Mihr over other gods. In any case, Mihr is also a Zoroastrian god connecting it with a wider religious landscape which makes the distinction between an independent religious tradition and polytheistic Zoroastrian religion even harder.

Whatever the nature of Bahrām's Mithraic beliefs may be, the notion of Mithra is important because it may provide evidence that there were conflicting tendencies within the Sasanian Empire. If Bahrām worshipped another god than the Sasanian elites, this might provide a reason for his revolt, as Pourshariati (2008: 398–404) stated. At the same time, we should bear in mind that nothing unambiguous is said about this as a reason for revolt, not in Sebeos's account nor in any other account. The evidence is weak and speculative.

## SIMOCATTA ON BAHRĀM ČŪBĪN

Theophylact Simocatta's *History*, written in Greek, cannot be precisely dated, but the latest event that he clearly mentions is the death of Khosrow II in 628. Simocatta's account includes about sixty pages on Bahrām Čübīn and related events (Simocatta, *History*: 80–85, 100–153). Simocatta's major source was John of Epiphania's *History*. This gives more credibility to his eastern accounts, since John served in an embassy in Persia sometime in the 590s, and met with many important personages at the time. For instance, according to Michael and Mary Whitby (1986: xxi–xxii), the diplomatic correspondences of Bahrām that we are about to discuss were no doubt recorded by him. Of course, this is a piece of information that cannot properly be verified nor contested.

Simocatta's details on Bahrām's revolt against Hormizd IV are very different from those of Sebeos. Simocatta (*History*: 81) notes that Bahrām sent conspicuous booty to Hormizd IV after conquering Suania. But unlike in Sebeos, in Simocatta's account Hormizd IV does not accuse Bahrām of stealing from the booty. In fact, nothing is mentioned about Hormizd IV's reactions. Only afterwards, when Bahrām's luck ran out and he received significant setbacks against the byzantine forces, did Hormizd IV start to severely insult him. He also sent Bahrām a female attire as a reward for his ignominy (Simocatta, *History*: 83). This started an exchange of

offences, which led to Hormizd IV's stripping Bahrām of his status in the army and, ultimately, to Bahrām's rebellion against Hormizd IV.

Simocatta is lengthier when it comes to legitimacy of power and kingship. According to Simocatta, Bahrām came from the house of Mirrames and belonged to the family of Arsacid, one of the seven Royal houses in Persia.<sup>9</sup> This information is corroborated in many other historical sources. But Simocatta (*History*: 101) adds, in a passage in which he describes respective functions of all the seven Royal houses in Persia, that the Arsacid family was the one who held the kingship, and they were also the ones with the role of placing the diadem on the king.<sup>10</sup> He attributes to them a royal halo but, at the same time, often describes Bahrām in very negative terms as a tyrant, usurper or barbarian. Even though the last appellation is generally used of all Persians, and is part of Simocatta's cultural bias on his "infidel" neighbors, this contradiction is noteworthy. Indeed, there are many passages in which Bahrām's royal origin and legitimacy is put in doubt. For instance, in Domitianus's speech, assumed royal origin is incongruous, since he takes a clear stand against Bahrām's legitimacy. He states:

The Persians do not welcome the tyranny. Baram is seated on faithless altars, for he is not endowed with royal birth. Therefore, since he has encompassed the foundation of his power with laws of insolence, he will soon be overthrown. (Simocatta, *History*: 137)

Another interesting feature of Simocatta's account is that it includes Bahrām Čübīn's letter to Khosrow II and Khosrow II's reply, both of which, according to Simocatta, are genuine compositions, quoted word for word. Unlike Sebeos, Simocatta, as far as we know, did not have access to an archive of official correspondence of Persian provenance. However, John of Epiphania, as a major source of Simocatta, might have had this information.

In his letter, Bahrām states that Khosrow II does not deserve the legitimacy of power since "the noble and distinguished did not take part in the voting along with the unranked and lower born" (Simocatta, *History*: 113). Besides this reference to the exclusion from the voting, Bahrām demands that those released from prison by Khosrow II should be kept behind bars, for there is no legal reason to release them without investigation. Identities of these persons and their crimes are not revealed. Despite these seemingly reasonable arguments for justice, the wording of the letter is boastful, arrogant, and a bit aggressive, and presents a rather negative image of Bahrām's attitude and intentions. For example, after a long list of laudatory epithets that Bahrām attributes to himself at the beginning of the letter, he continues by saying "I have received what was written by your defective and minimal intelligence" (Simocatta, *History*: 113). Bahrām also directly asks Khosrow II to resign his kingship by saying "lay down the crown in the holy places and withdraw from the royal places" (Simocatta, *History*: 113).

Khosrow II replies to these arguments and says that his kingship is lawful, rightful, and executed in accordance with Persian customs. He will not consider re-imprisoning those who have already been released. (Simocatta, *History*: 114) His wording is very diplomatic, and he gives Bahrām a noble way out of the delicate situation, proposing that perhaps Bahrām's aggressive words did not pour out of his own heart but were the result of a drunken drafter. As a king, Khosrow II could have chosen a far more threatening and authoritarian attitude.

---

<sup>9</sup> Mirrames is a Greek form of *Mehrān* in Persian. Cf. Shahbazi 1989.

<sup>10</sup> This passage starts with a rare mention to an oral source: "I heard a certain Babylonian, a sacred official who had gained very great experience in the composition of royal epistles, say that [...]." According to the editors, Michael and Mary Whitby, this might refer to a Persian ambassador in Constantinople during Heraclius' reign.



As to religious themes, there is one mention of Mithra in Simocatta. However, it is not directly associated with Bahrām. The passage appears after Khosrow II was severely defeated by Bahrām's troops. In the following despair he had allegedly changed his religion into Christianity and "disregarded the false gods and put no hopes on Mithra" (Simocatta, *History*: 116). Most probably, this conversion is but a fanciful fabrication, part of the Christian propaganda deployed throughout Simocatta's account. We cannot say, based merely on this quote, whether Khosrow II did not put his hopes on Mithra because Mithra was a god of his enemy, Bahrām, or because it was among those false gods that he himself used to worship. Certainly, whatever gods a person worshipped previously, he should leave them behind after a conversion to Christianity. As we have stated earlier, Mihr is also a Zoroastrian god and the text gives no evidence of an independent Mithraic cult. In any case, there is no direct link to Bahrām Čubin.

### AL-ṬABARĪ ON BAHRĀM ČUBĪN

Al-Ṭabarī's (d. 923) account, around eight pages in the modern edition, is short in comparison with Simocatta's (al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*: 988–1001/1). We should also bear in mind that al-Ṭabarī wrote his history more than two hundred fifty years after Sebeos and Simocatta and no tangible link between these two and al-Ṭabarī can be found. Therefore, al-Ṭabarī should be considered part of another historiographical tradition. Indeed, this difference is attested in many layers of the composition, in both its rendering and its textual content. Of course, al-Ṭabarī's context is Islamic and his style is influenced by, for example, hadith tradition and preserves *isnāds* to some extent. Yet, in the sections on pre-Islamic Iranian and Sasanian history the *isnāds* are absent in the narrative. Instead, he uses more ambiguous and anonymous expressions to introduce his sources.<sup>11</sup>

What can one say about the sources used by al-Ṭabarī? We know that, among other sources, he used various Arabic written sources that go back to the Sasanian royal chronicle, the *Khwadāy-nāmag*.<sup>12</sup> Al-Ṭabarī may also have used Persian oral sources, but, unfortunately, he rarely indicates the names of his authorities or where and when he might have had contact with them (Rosenthal 1989: 6). With the exception of Hišām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. 206/821), no other source is introduced in the section on Sasanian history (Zakeri 2008). Many of the written sources are no longer extant. However, in the rare cases where a written source has survived intact and we can compare it with al-Ṭabarī's text, we can see that he did not quote the sources verbatim (Peacock 2007: 12; Robinson 2003: 36).

Neither Simocatta nor al-Ṭabarī, in contrast to Sebeos, give the booty a reason for the start of the revolt. Al-Ṭabarī relates that after a victorious battle against Barmūdāh, a son of the king of the Turks, Bahrām sent to Hormizd IV wealth, jewels, vessels, and weapons equal to two hundred fifty thousand camel loads.<sup>13</sup> Hormizd IV thanked Bahrām for the booty.

According to al-Ṭabarī, the reason for rebellion came later, and Hormizd IV's violent behavior was the cause:

11 These introductions include expressions such as *qāla*, *qīla*, *yaqūlu*, *dukira*, *za'amū*, *qāla al-Majūs*, *nassaba* or *nassabū al-Furs*, *'ulamā' al-Furs* etc. See Zakeri 2008: 27–40.

12 Rubin (2008: 57–62) discusses the *Khwadāy-nāmag*'s role in al-Ṭabarī's writing and sources extensively. See also Darayee 2010: xvii.

13 This number is obviously exaggerated.

However, Bahrām was afraid of Hurmuz’s violence, as were the troops who were with him, so he threw off allegiance to Hurmuz, advanced toward al-Madā’in, showed vexation to Hurmuz’s behavior, and proclaimed that Hurmuz’s son Abarwīz was more fitted for the royal power than he. (al-Ṭabarī, *The History*: 303; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*: 993/1)

Bahrām’s declaration that Hormizd IV’s son Khosrow II (Abarwīz) was more fitted for power is an interesting detail because it casts a new light on Bahrām’s revolt. One can conclude that al-Ṭabarī wanted to give the impression that Bahrām’s final aim was not to usurp the power for himself, but rather to pass it to Khosrow II. He wanted to be a sort of middleman in the rightful succession of power. Nevertheless, the rest of the account contradicts this interpretation. Still, in Bal’amī’s account, as we will see, this idea is reiterated and further developed.

Regarding dynastic legitimacy, al-Ṭabarī offers us many interesting details. One clear statement for Khosrow II’s kingship is found in al-Ṭabarī. Khosrow himself is speaking:

It is part of our religion to choose piety [above all other things], and part of our considered opinion to do good works. Our grandfather Kisrā, son of Qubādh, was like a parent for you, and our grandfather Hurmuz was a just judge for you; so ensure that you remain obedient and submissive now. (al-Ṭabarī, *The History*: 306; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*: 995–996/1)

This passage emphasizes how important proper royal lineage is for kingship (Christensen 1936: 92–107). Not just anybody could seize the royal power. In contrast to Khosrow II, Bahrām is seen as a usurper and is given no legitimate claim to power:

The prominent leaders and great men of state gathered around him, and Bahrām addressed them, abusing Abarwīz and blaming him. Several sessions of argument and disputation took place between him and the prominent leaders, all of whom were averse to him. Nevertheless, Bahrām seated himself on the royal throne and had himself crowned, and the people gave him obedience out of fear. (al-Ṭabarī, *The History*: 306; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*: 999/1)

Bahrām’s position is therefore unnatural and contradictory to Persian customs. There is no possibility of justifying his position. Bahrām’s Arsacid lineage is not mentioned and there is nothing to suggest that he himself could have a noble origin.

There is no mention whatsoever of Bahrām’s religious stance or attitudes. Whatever al-Ṭabarī’s sources in this particular occasion may have been, either they did not preserve the information on Bahrām’s religious stance, or, if they did, al-Ṭabarī did not deem it important. In any case, we cannot investigate this aspect of Bahrām’s character further.

We can also note that none of the meticulously cited letters in Sebeos’s and Simocatta’s accounts, which seem to give an inner look to the conflict, are extant. For sure, al-Ṭabarī did not have access to official correspondence contemporary to Bahrām, as Sebeos and Simocatta might have had.

## BAL’AMĪ ON BAHRĀM ČŪBĪN

Bal’amī’s account includes about sixty pages on Bahrām Čubin (Bal’amī: 758–805, 835–839, 1010–1019). Bal’amī died in 940; his work inaugurates historic writing in the New Persian language, thereby marking the beginning of a new historiographical tradition.<sup>14</sup> Bal’amī’s *Tārīkh*, written in Persian, is an adaptation of al-Ṭabarī’s book. Even though Bal’amī himself

14 Unfortunately, there is such a plethora of manuscripts – at least 160 different copies – of Bal’amī’s history, that a definitive reconstruction of the original script is challenging if not impossible. See Daniel 2003; Peacock 2007.



uses the word *tarjama* in his introduction (Bal‘amī, *Tārīkh-nāme-ye Ṭabarī* I: 2), the text is far from being a word-for-word translation. Still, one can notice a certain degree of similarity in content and rendering (Peacock 2007: 1–14). Therefore, it is striking to observe how different the two are in length, as well as in overall substance and style. By his own admission, the author abridged, rearranged, supplemented, and even critiqued the very al-Ṭabarī’s text he was supposed to be translating. (Daniel 2003: 164)

We also know that Bal‘amī’s book was commissioned by a certain Abū Šāliḥ Maṣṣūr b. Nūḥ and that he traced his genealogy back to Bahrām Čübīn,<sup>15</sup> since Bal‘amī cited Maṣṣūr b. Nūḥ’s genealogy in his introduction.<sup>16</sup> This might suggest that Bal‘amī’s approach to Bahrām Čübīn is positively biased, and in fact, we can observe some indications to this direction.

It is certain that Bal‘amī used several sources in addition to al-Ṭabarī. For instance, there are passages in which he openly states that he will complete the story using his own information, because al-Ṭabarī has left it incomplete.<sup>17</sup> The text also contains a reference to Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī’s *Šāhnāme-ye bozorg* (Bal‘amī *Tārīkh-nāme-ye Ṭabarī* I: 5), which, according to Hämeen-Anttila (2013), is a mistake and can be identified with the same author’s book *Ta’rīkh*.<sup>18</sup> What is more, Peacock states that according to some manuscripts, the *Akhbār-e ‘Ajam* served as a source for the episode of Bahrām Čübīn in Bal‘amī’s text (Peacock 2007: 90). Furthermore, the text contains some poetry in Arabic that is not found in al-Ṭabarī’s original text.

On the subject of the rebellion, Bal‘amī writes more exclusively than al-Ṭabarī and dedicates a whole chapter to the topic.<sup>19</sup> Booty also plays a role in this version. According to Bal‘amī, Bahrām sent booty to Hormizd IV after a victorious battle against the king of the Turks. During the inventory, Hormizd IV’s vizier Yazdān Bakhšeš indicated that some of the booty was missing.

In fact, a few pages earlier, Bal‘amī describes how Bahrām gathers the booty and sends some of it to Hormizd IV, also sharing some of it among his men. (Bal‘amī, *Tārīkh-nāme-ye Ṭabarī* II: 771) So there is no room for speculation whether the accusation was simply a ruse of Yazdān or a fact that he justly revealed.

In any case, Hormizd IV becomes angry and accuses Bahrām of disloyalty. He sends Bahrām a letter, a woman’s spindle, a piece of cotton and a fetter as a sign of his treachery. Bahrām shows the items to his men, and they become furious. They are offended because the deeds of their commander are not recognized. They encourage Bahrām to rebel. Bahrām agrees and responds to Hormizd IV by sending twelve thousand swords with blunted tips as a sign of revolt. (Bal‘amī, *Tārīkh-nāme-ye Ṭabarī* II: 774–775)

15 Abū Šāliḥ Maṣṣūr b. Nūḥ was a Samanid ruler (961–976) in Transoxania and Khorasan and successor of his brother ‘Abd al-Malek after 961. See Bosworth 1983.

16 Meisami (1999: 25–35) explains the context of Bal‘amī’s and Abū Šāliḥ Maṣṣūr b. Nūḥ’s relationship and the internal dynamics of the court during this period. See also Bal‘amī, *Tārīkh-nāme-ye Ṭabarī* I: 2.

17 In all of these occasions, the source of the information is not explicitly mentioned, but if the title “*ketāb-e akhbār-e ‘ajam*” refers to an actual book title, then the source is mentioned in the following example. Bal‘amī (*Tārīkh-nāme-ye Ṭabarī* II: 764) states: “*Va Muḥammad b. Jarīr ḥadīṭ-e Bahrām-e Čübīn tamām nagofte ast, va man be ketāb-e akhbār-e ‘ajam tamāmtar yāftam va begūyam...*”

18 “The title does not quite match the brevity of Ḥamza’s *Ta’rīkh*, but there is no reason to suppose another book by him.” Hämeen-Anttila 2013: 70.

19 “*khabar-e ‘āšī šodan-e Bahrām Šübīn bar Hormoz*”, Bal‘amī, *Tārīkh-nāme-ye Ṭabarī* II: 774–775.

It is noteworthy that later in the story Hormizd IV regrets his actions.<sup>20</sup> He endeavors to reconcile with Bahrām by ordering Yazdān Bakhšeš to apologize. Hormizd IV also calls Bahrām a noble man. Bahrām accepts his apology and is eager to make peace with Hormizd IV. (Bal‘amī, *Tārīkh-nāme-ye Ṭabarī* II: 779)

Regarding dynastic legitimacy, Bal‘amī tells a different story from the one related by al-Ṭabarī. First of all, like Simocatta, Bal‘amī claims that Bahrām was of royal origin.<sup>21</sup> Bal‘amī describes Bahrām with numerous positive and laudatory attributes. He states that of all the Persian kings there are only two who could be commended for their bravery (*mardī*) and willingness to fight (*mobārazat*): Bahrām Gūr and Bahrām Čübīn. (Bal‘amī, *Tārīkh-nāme-ye Ṭabarī* II: 763) Bal‘amī continues by affirming that Anūšīrvān Khosrow I, predecessor and father of Hormizd IV, placed under Bahrām’s control Armenia, Azerbaijan and the regions Jibāl, Jorjān, and Ṭabarestān. These are all details that reinforce the idea that Bahrām had royal origins and authority and was capable of ruling.

Bal‘amī does not deny that Bahrām sat on the throne, but he claims that his ultimate intention was to fight Hormizd IV and give the kingship to Šahriyār, another son of Hormizd IV, whom he considered more fit to have power. Bahrām communicated this idea to his men and they all considered it a sound and rightful plan. (Bal‘amī, *Tārīkh-nāme-ye Ṭabarī* II: 788–789) De facto, Bal‘amī does not give any direct legitimacy for Bahrām’s kingship.

As in al-Ṭabarī’s account, there is no mention of Bahrām’s religious stance or attitudes. It is also remarkable that Šahriyār, and the motive ascribed to him, do not appear in other sources.<sup>22</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In these four accounts, we can see a shared core of information and details that vary considerably. The overall attitude towards Bahrām is reserved and negative. Only Bal‘amī tries to mitigate the wicked image of Bahrām, emphasizing his royal origins in a consistent way that, in contrast to Simocatta, he does not revoke later in the text. The other three all portray Bahrām Čübīn as an unwanted usurper who has no royal legitimacy whatsoever.

Considerable differences can also be seen regarding names and places, since the sources do not share much in this respect. Except for the main protagonists, such as Bahrām Čübīn himself, Hormizd IV, Khosrow II, and Khosrow II’s two uncles Bišām and Bindūy, the catalogue of persons is very irregular. There is very little in common with all the four sources. To give an example, if we regard the persons and places in al-Ṭabarī and Bal‘amī, in the passages regarding Bahrām Čübīn, we note that 20 of al-Ṭabarī’s 41 personal names and 11 of his 22 place names do not appear at all in Bal‘amī. Conversely, 38 of Bal‘amī’s 56 person’s names and 25 of his 32 places do not appear in al-Ṭabarī. Similar disparities exist between all four sources.

For further research, the link between al-Ṭabarī and Bal‘amī regarding Bahrām Čübīn is especially interesting. Broader and more exhaustive comparisons within the Persian and Arabic

20 This motive of Hormizd IV regretting his actions can be found in other Arabic and Persian historical accounts such as Ya‘qūbī’s *Ta’rīkh* (al-Ya‘qūbī: 190), the anonymous *Nihāyat al-arab fi akhbār al-furs wa al-‘arab* (Anon.: 361) and Firdawsī’s *Šāhnāme* (Firdawsī, *Shāhnāme* VII: 592).

21 “*Aṣl-e moulūdaš az Rey būd o az malekzādagān o esfahbodān-e Rey būd*”, Bal‘amī, *Tārīkh-nāme-ye Ṭabarī* II: 762. However, we should be cautious about this, because the royal origin in this context could mean many things. It could refer either to the lineage of a local king or as well as to one of the seven royal houses.

22 Nevertheless the motive exists in other Arabic sources such as *Nihāyat al-arab fi akhbār al-furs wa al-‘arab* (Anon.: 370) and Dīnavarī (Al-Dīnavarī: 94).

historiographical sources could also be interesting, since we know that these three themes are very differently dealt in other sources.<sup>23</sup> This comparison could shed more light on al-Ṭabarī's and Bal'āmī's respective sources as well as to their interrelation. It is obvious that their sources are very different, since the approach and content of each is remarkably different.

Simocatta and Bal'āmī share one feature, for both of them tell about blasphemous gifts sent by Hormizd IV to Bahrām. In Simocatta, these consist of female attire, and in Bal'āmī, of woman's a spindle, a piece of cotton and a fetter. We encounter the same theme in other Persian and Arabic sources such as Firdawsī and al-Ṭa'ālibī.<sup>24</sup> In all of them, a common theme of female clothes or a spindle can be found.

According to Howard-Johnston (2006: 48), an interesting feature of Sebeos's account in relation to other Arabic and Persian sources is that it is, at least to some extent, parallel to extant derivatives of the Persian *Khwadāy-nāmag*. This interpretation can be contested since we do not have a clear picture of what the *Khwadāy-nāmag* – characterized more accurately as a cycle of writings for many different books bore the same title – may have contained and therefore, we cannot accurately determine the content of the derivatives either. Furthermore, the similarity in content does not allow us to draw conclusions about the same sources of these distinctive historiographical traditions. In any case Sebeos and Simocatta are an important source of comparison: they can complete and adjust the picture of certain events in Persian and Arabic historiographical sources. Therefore, they should not be omitted.

The remarks presented in this article are only a prelude to a more detailed and exhaustive analysis. This study is important because all the interrelations and connections between these four and many other sources, whether in Arabic, Greek, Armenia, Syriac, or Persian, are not fully understood.

## REFERENCES

- ANONYMOUS. *Nihāyat al-arab fī akhbār al-furs wa al-'arab*. Ed. Muḥammad Taqī Dānešpa3ūh, AHŠ 1375. Tehran: Anjoman-e ātār o mafākher-e farhangi.
- BAL'AMĪ. *Tārīkh-nāme-ye Ṭabarī*, I. Ed. M. Roušan, AHŠ 1374. Tehran: Čāpkhāne-ye Enteshār-e Soruš.
- BAL'AMĪ. *Tārīkh-nāme-ye Ṭabarī*, II. Ed. M. Roušan, AHŠ 1374. Tehran: Čāpkhāne-ye Enteshār-e Soruš.
- BOSWORTH, C.E. 1983. Abu Saleh Mansur (I) Nuh. *Encyclopaedia Iranica* I, Fasc. 4: 383–384. <www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abu-saleh-mansur-i-b>.
- CHRISTENSEN, Arthur 1907. *Romanen om Bahrām Tschōbīn: et rekonstruktionsforsøg*. Copenhagen: J. Cohens Bogtrykkerier.
- CHRISTENSEN Arthur 1936. *L'Iran sous les sassanides*. Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard.
- DANIEL, Elton 2003. Bal'āmī's Account of Early Islamic History. In: F. DAFTARY & J.W. MERI (eds), *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in honour of Wilferd Madelung*: 163–189. London: I.B. Taurus.
- DARAYEE, Touraj 2010. *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and fall of an empire*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- AL-DĪNAVĀRĪ, Abū Ḥanīfa. *Kitāb al-Aḥbār aṭ-ṭiwāl*. Ed. I. Kratchkovsky, 1912. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- FIRDAWSĪ. *Shāhnāme* VII–VIII. Ed. Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh & Abolfazl Khatibi, 1987–2008. (Persian Text Series. New Series 1) NY: Bibliotheca Persica.
- GARDĪZĪ. *Zayn al-akhbār*. Ed. Raḥīm Reḡā-Zāde Malek, AHŠ 1384. (Silsile-ye intišārāt-e Anjuman-e ātār o-mafākher-e farhangi 346) Tehran: Anjoman-e ātār o-mafākher-e farhangi.

23 For instance, in Gardīzī's *Zayn al-akhbār*, Bahrām's troops are more blamed for the rebellion than the general himself. See Meisami 1999: 69; Gardīzī, *Zayn al-akhbār*: 98–101.

24 Firdawsī, *Shāhnāme* VII: 580; Tha'ālibī, *Histoire*: 657.

- GREATREX, Geoffrey & Samuel S.N. LIEU. 2002. *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars*, II (AD 363–630). London: Routledge.
- HÄMEEN-ANTTILA, Jaakko 2013. Al-Kisrawī and the Arabic Translations of the *Khwadāynāmag*. *Studia Orientalia* 114: 65–92. Helsinki: The Finnish Oriental Society.
- HOWARD-JOHNSTON, James 2000. Introduction. In: SEBEOS, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, I & II. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- HOWARD-JOHNSTON, James 2006. *Armenian Historians of Heraclius: An Examination of the aims, sources and working-methods of Sebeos and Movses Daskhurantsi, in East Rome, Sasanian Persia and the end of antiquity*. Burlington: Ashgate.
- MEISAMI, Julie Scott 1999. *Persian Historiography: To the end of the twelfth century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- PEACOCK, Andrew C.S. 2007. *Medieval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy: Bal'mī's Tārīkh-nāma*. London: Routledge.
- POURSHARIATI, Parvaneh 2008. *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian confederacy and the Arab conquest of Iran*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- ROBINSON, Chase F. 2003. *Islamic Historiography*, I. Cambridge: CUP.
- ROSENTHAL, Franz. 1989. *General Introduction in The History of al-Ṭabarī: General introduction and from the creation to the flood*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- RUBIN, Zeev 2008. Al-Ṭabarī and the Age of the Sasanians. In: H. KENNEDY (ed.), *Al-Ṭabarī: A Medieval Muslim historian and his work*: 41–71. Princeton: The Darwin Press.
- SEBEOS. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, I & II. Tr. R.W. Thomson & comm. J. Howard-Johnston & T. Greenwood, 2000. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- SHAHBAZI, Shapur A. 1989. Bahrām VI Čōbīn. *Encyclopaedia Iranica* III, Fasc. 5: 514–522. <[www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bahram-the-name-of-six-sasanian-kings#pt7](http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bahram-the-name-of-six-sasanian-kings#pt7)>.
- SHAHBAZI, Shapur A. 1990. Byzantine-Iranian Relations. *Encyclopaedia Iranica* IV, Fasc. 6: 588–599. <[www.iranicaonline.org/articles/byzantine-iranian-relations](http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/byzantine-iranian-relations)>.
- SIMOCATTA, Theophylact. *History of Theophylact Simocatta*. Tr. & ed. Michael & Mary Whitby, 1986. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- AL-ṬABARĪ. *The History of al-Ṭabarī: The Sāsānids, the Byzantines, the Lakmids, and Yemen*, V. Tr. C.E. Bosworth, 1999. Albany: SUNY Press.
- AL-ṬABARĪ, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr. *Ta'riḫ al-rusūl wa al-mulūk*. Ed. M.J. de Goeje et al. as *Annales*, 1879–1901. Three volumes in fifteen. Brill: Leiden.
- THA'ĀLIBĪ. *Histoire des rois des Perses par Abou Mansour Abd al-Malik ibn Mohammad ibn Isma'il al-Tha'ālibī*. Tr. Zotenberg, 1900. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale.
- WHITBY, Michael & Mary WHITBY 1986. Introduction. In: T. SIMOCATTA, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- AL-YA'QUBĪ. *Ta'riḫ*. Ed. M. Th. Houtsma, 1883. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- ZAKERI, Mohsen 2008. Al-Ṭabarī on Sasanian History: A Study of sources. In: H. KENNEDY (ed.), *Al-Ṭabarī: A Medieval Muslim historian and his work*: 27–40. Princeton: The Darwin Press.